Knowledge Generation in the Field of Grey Literature: A Review of Conference-based Research Results

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Abstract

Perhaps the most cost effective research carried out in information science today is in the field of grey literature. The published proceedings in the GL-Conference Series provide a record of impressive research results in this field of information. These results are based on various and diverse approaches and methodologies, whereby citation data, survey data, systems data, bibliographic and metadata, as well as other evidence based variables and indicators are compiled, processed, and analysed. Notwithstanding the fact that knowledge generation is an important measure of wealth in science and technology, the costs in human and material resources appropriated from research budgets must also weigh-in to determine real effectiveness. Only in this way can our initial rhetoric be transformed into a working hypothesis. This research project, which lies within the structure of the GL-Conference Series, seeks to analyse not only the benefits of research on grey literature but also the costs related to carrying-out and publishing research results. In order to gather evidence-based data, a Project Information Document (PID) Form similar to others that are in place and use elsewhere has been designed to accommodate GL research. The PID-Form will be distributed to those authors/researchers, who respond to the GL8 Call for Papers, as well as to authors/researchers from last year's conference in this series.

Results gathered from these research resumes are expected to provide answers to relevant questions such as the percentage of research on the topic of grey literature that is formally funded, the ratio of ad hoc research, the ratio of individual to team research, average research costs and expenses, the duration of research projects, etc. This evidence-based data will then enable us to grasp the cost effectiveness of research on grey literature and compare other types of data compiled within a conference structure. And, in so doing, our results will help to demonstrate the power of grey literature to other information professionals as well as policy and decision makers, funding bodies and new investors. Furthermore, our results may be seen as indicative for other S&T conferences based on a call-for-papers.

Introduction

Knowledge generation is a process. Most often it is tedious work over a long period of time. Research results are like various sized blocks, hewn as it were and assembled to form a base. This paper presents an overview of conference based research results, which our team considers relevant to a better understanding of the field of grey literature.

This research project can also be seen as a follow-up to previous research carried out by team over the past four years in which other types of conference based data were compiled via diverse methods, namely: a Review of the literature in 2003[1]; a General Survey on Grey Literature in 2004[2]; Citation Analyses in 2004[3] and 2005[4]; and, an Author Survey in 2005[5].

Research Method

Practically, the same pool of respondents i.e. the Authors in the GL Conference series participated in all of the above-mentioned research projects. And, the same team of researchers *i.e.* project workers from INIST and GreyNet constructed and carried out the projects.

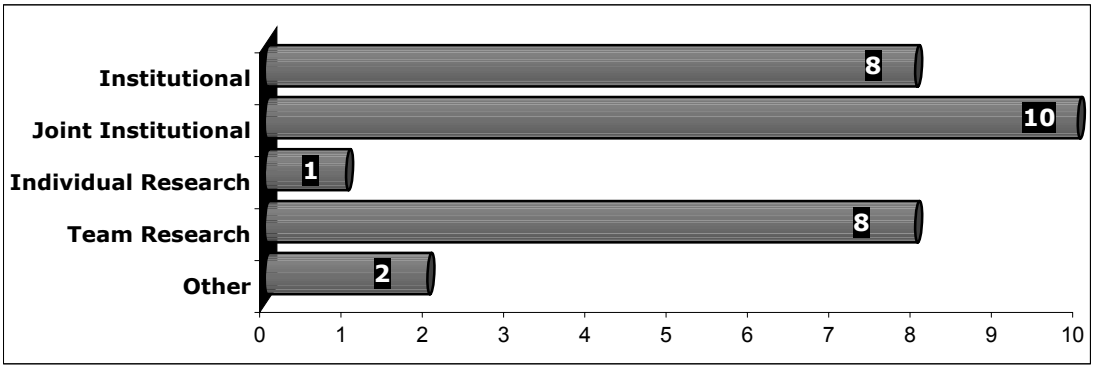
With the Call-for-Papers in 2005, those submitting proposals were asked to provide within the abstracts cost-related information on their research project. However, no standardized format was provided. Nineteen of the 29 submissions contained such information. The GL authors were thus prepared to provide this type of information in the same degree that they were willing to respond to the Author Survey *i.e.* roughly 56%. This then led us to undertake the present study.

We decided to implement a standardized form in 2006 that would better capture project data. A web search revealed that the U.S. Department of Agriculture[6], the World Bank[7] and IMF, as well as a number of CRIS, Current Research Information Systems, already have in place PID-Forms, which served as useful examples. We then drafted a PID-Form fitted to conference-based data. The form consists of 7 sections, totalling 20 response items, (***see Appendix***).

The PID forms were emailed to the first or sole author in each project both within the GL7 and GL8 Conference Programs. This totalled 52 projects of which 29 completed PIDs were returned and processed.

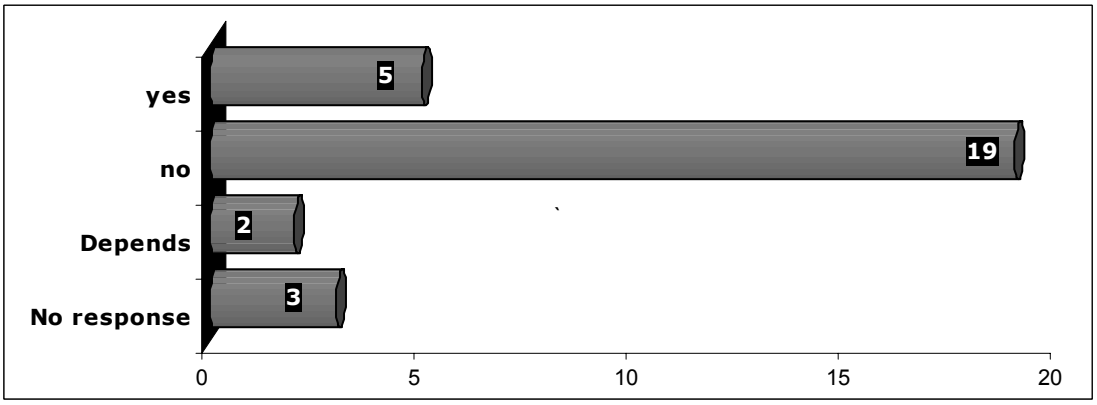
Project Information Document Results

Graphic 1 - Project Type



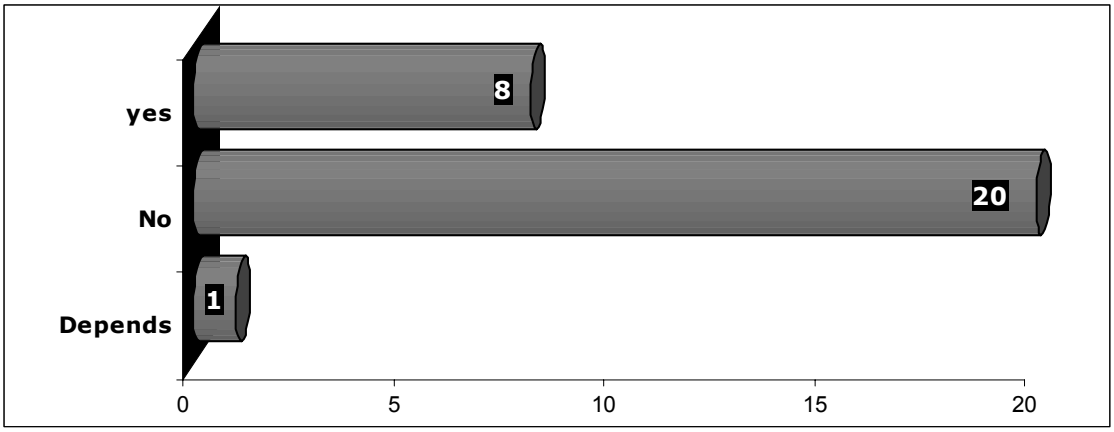
This graphic illustrates the response to *item 1.2* on the PID Form, which deals with Project Type. Over a third (10/29) of the PIDs were JIRs, Joint Institutional Research Projects. When we look more closely at this type of project, we not only find that it was collaboration on an institutional level but also it was a cross-country or international collaboration. Fifteen years ago, research on grey literature was most often the work of lone individuals within a library or documentation center. Today that project type now appears to be the exception.

Graphic 2 - Required Publication



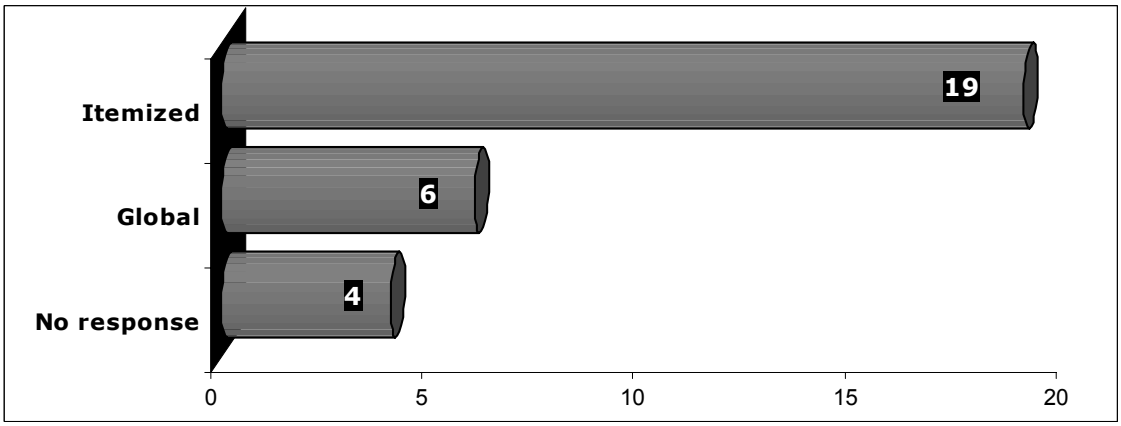
This graphic illustrates the response to *item 1.3* on the PID Form inquiring as to whether a project was linked to an academic title or requirement that a researcher publishes. Less than a fifth of the respondents (5/29) acknowledged that this was the case. And, while there is no previous data to draw comparisons, it would be worthwhile to examine future trends in this direction.

Graphic 3 - Grant/Funding Body



This graphic illustrates the response to *item 4.1* on the PID Form, which inquired whether funding or a grant organization was involved in the project? While less than a third (8/29) claimed this to be the case, half of those responses were Joint Institutional Research Projects (4/8). Which may lead us to believe that the best chance to receive project funding is within a JIR project structure.

Graphic 4 - Project Costs



This graphic illustrates the choice made by the respondents to either itemize the project costs *(item 4.3)* or simply provide a global estimate of the project costs *(item 4.4)*. Our findings show that only a fifth of the respondents (6/29) did not provide a specific amount or sum in either of these response items.
Further, we can only assume that those who itemized the number of days invested in a project *(item 4.3.3)* did so by taking into consideration the number of project workers mentioned in *(item 2.1)*. Also we must assume that the average number of days in a working month is 22, whereby weekends are excluded.

Table 1 - Uses and Applications

We see in this table the response to *(item 3.2)*, where the proposed uses and applications of research results were explained. Since this was an open question, the 29 possible responses had to be first coded and classified. This led to our six categories.

Uses and Applications	
Development of Resources	8
Theory and Knowledge	6
Quality Assessment	4
Management & Practice	8
Source of revenue	1
No Response	2

Table 2 - Project Duration

This table was calculated using the Project start date found in *(item 6.1)* and the Project termination date *(item 6.2)*. The average duration of a project was 23 months, which well exceeds the 9-month period between the Call-for-Papers and the presentation of the research results at the annual conference. The explanation of this should be found in the response to *(item 5.1),* the Project History where prior or related research projects and proposals are documented.

Project Duration in months	
Average	23
Maximum	108
Minimum	1

Conclusions and Recommendations

The PID–form was distributed between 6 to18 months after the Call-for-Papers. Six months distanced from GL8 (December, 2006) and eighteen months distanced from GL7 (December, 2005). Had the researchers i.e. project workers received the PID-Forms immediately upon submission of their abstract, they may have been made more conscious of cost related issues in their projects and in turn the results would have been more comprehensive.

Interesting to note, a completed PID-form was regarded as a Project Information Document i.e. a specific type of grey literature, much like fact sheets, technical notes, tenders, etc. Also, in November 2006, during a series of guest lectures, a group of graduate students in information studies at the University of Amsterdam were asked to comment on our PID-Form used in gathering conference data. As newcomers to the GL Conference Series their interest was first of all with *(item 1.1)*, the Title of the Project and secondly with *(item 3.2)*, the Uses and Applications of the Results. I could understand their interest in the later, and came to realize that the project titles could also be coded and classified by subject area, giving an outsider group a clearer understanding of where research was being carried out in the field of grey literature.

As to whether our results may be seen as indicative for other S&T conferences based on a call-for-papers, the answer leans to the affirmative. Just recently, the National Library of Canada in Montreal requested a summary of conference registrations fees over the past five years. They want to organize an international conference in 2008. GreyNet has this information and is certainly willing to share it with other conference organizers, where knowledge generation in the field of grey literature stands to benefit.

In fine, one way of better sharing conference based results with other communities of researchers would be to make the PIDs, openly available on the conference site. A revised version of the PID-Form should clearly state that the information and data provided by the project workers would be publicly accessible. In fact, the revised PID-Form could replace the instrument used in previous Call-for-Papers simply by introducing in Section 3 of the PID Form, an item titled 'Abstract'. And, during the course of their research, project workers could periodically revise and update their Project Information Document up until its termination date.

Appendix: PID – Project Information Document

GL Project Résumé Sheet

1.1. Title Project: *(If it carries the title of the Conference Paper enter "Same")*

1.2. Project Type: (*Indicate by placing an* [x] *in the appropriate box)*

[ ] Institutional (only within your institution)
[ ] Joint Institutional (in cooperation with other institutions)
[ ] Individual Research (non-institutional)
[ ] Team Research (collaborative, non-institutional)
[ ] Other:

1.3. Is this project linked to an academic title, required publication, etc.?

2.1. Name(s) Project Worker(s):
2.2. Email Contact Address:

3.1. Approach/Methodology:
3.2. Proposed Use and Application of Results:

4.1. Funding/Grant Organization(s): *(If none skip to question 4.3)*

4.2. Project Budget: *(Total estimate in US$ or Euro)*

4.3. Project Costs and Expenses *(Itemized)*

4.3.1. Special equipment and supplies:
4.3.2. Salaries *(only if directly related to the project)*:
4.3.3. Estimate total N° of days invested in the project:
4.3.4. Travel, Lodging:
4.3.5. Conference Registration:
4.3.6. Other:

4.4. Project Costs and Expenses *(Total amount from 4.3 or a global estimate)*

5.1. Project History: *(Prior or Related Research Projects and Proposals)*

6.1. Project Start Date: (mm/dd/yy)
6.2. Project Termination Date: (mm/dd/yy)

7.1. Other Comments:

References

[1] Farace, D.J. and J. Frantzen (2004), Four Winds on the Grey Landscape: A Review of Four Information Professionals, their Work and Impact on the Field of Grey Literature. - In: GL5 Conference Proceedings. – Amsterdam : TextRelease, pp. 10-12. – (ISSN 1386-2316 ; No. 5)
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[2] Boekhorst, A.K., D.J. Farace and J. Frantzen (2005), Grey Literature Survey 2004: A Research Project Tracking Developments in the Field of GL. – In: GL6 Conference Proceedings. – Amsterdam : TextRelease, pp. 1-9. – (ISSN 1386-2316 ; No. 6)
ISBN 90-77484-04-3

[3] Schöpfel, J., C. Stock, D.J. Farace, and J. Frantzen (2005), Citation Analysis and Grey Literature: Stakeholders in the Grey Circuit. – In: GL6 Conference Proceedings. – Amsterdam : TextRelease, pp. 55-63. – (ISSN 1386-2316 ; No. 6)
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[4] Farace, D.J., J. Frantzen, J. Schöpfel, C. Stock, and A.K. Boekhorst (2006), Access to Grey Content: An Analysis of Grey Literature based on Citation and Survey Data: A Follow-up Study. – In: GL7 Conference Proceedings. – Amsterdam : TextRelease, pp. 194-203. – (ISSN 1386-2316 ; No. 7)
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[5] Idem

[6] http://www.csrees.usda.gov/business/businessfaqs/ad416r01.pdf
USDA Research Work Unit/Project Description (Accessed January, 2007)

[7] http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/main?pagePK=64187835&piPK=64620093&theSitePK=523679&menuPK=64187283&siteName=WDS&pageSize=20&docTY=540659
World Bank Project Information Documents (Accessed January, 2007)